

**Conference Board Report
82nd Annual Meeting
January 16 – 20, 2006
Bellevue, WA**

United States	Canada
Alaska Longline Fishermen’s Association	Annieville Halibut Association
Alaska Trollers Association	Canadian Sablefish Association
APICDA Vessel Inc.	Gulf Crab Fishermen’s Association
Area 3B/4A False Pass	Gulf Troller’s Association
Atka Fishermen's Association	Halibut Advisory Board
Central Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association	Huu-Ay-Aht First Nation
Coastal Villages Region Fund	North Pacific Halibut Fishermen’s Association
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific	Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council
Fishing Vessel Owners Association	Pacific Coast Fishing Vessel Owners Guild
Gulf of Alaska Coastal Coalition	Pacific Longline Halibut Fisherman’s Assoc
Kodiak Longliners Association	Steveston Halibut Association
Kodiak Vessel Owners Association	
Lake and Peninsula Borough	
Makah Fisheries Management	
North Pacific Fisheries Association	
Petersburg Vessel Owners Association	
Quiliute Indian Nation	
Quinault Indian Nation	
Seafood Producers Coop	
Sitka Halibut & Blackcod Marketing Association	
Tribal Government of St Paul	
United Fishermen’s Marketing Association	
Washington Trollers Association	
Westport Charter Association	

REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER

The United States section accredited 24 organizations for participation in the 2006 conference board proceedings.

The Canada section accredited 11 organizations for participation in the 2006 conference board proceedings.

SELECT CHAIRPERSONS FROM CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

On the United States side, Robert Alverson was selected as Chair.

On the Canadian side, George Cormier was selected Co-Chair.

CONFERENCE BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS TO IPHC

A. REVIEW AREAS

The Conference Board has no recommendations for new or altered IPHC areas.

The Conference Board entertained a motion to redefine Areas 4CDE as one area and this failed with two in the minority. No further action was taken under this agenda action

B. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL AREAS

The Conference Board presents to the Commission a split decision from the harvesters for an opening date.

The United States section supports an opening date of Sunday, February 26 for the following reasons:

1. The recent seasons have started close to this date and the existing markets for halibut have become accustomed for sales beginning March 1st. The United States harvesters do not want to disrupt this marketing strategy.
2. There are rockfish bycatch problems in both Area 2C and 2A relative to yelloweye rockfish. The yelloweye rockfish off of Washington and Oregon are listed as overfished and the earlier date allows for fishermen to target in deeper water for halibut, and avoid the yelloweye rockfish.
3. The United States harvesters believe the industry must maintain as long a season as possible to provide fresh fish for the public in order to compete with potential farmed halibut. Farmed halibut are harvested and butchered currently during the current closed winter period which provides for them to establish a competitive advantage in the North American markets.
4. The Conference Board was given a report by staff on the harvest amounts between February 25 to March 5 in Area 2C. The amount of fish from outside waters of 2C was about 260,000 pounds. The US section did not believe this posed a biological risk to Area 2B for potential returning spawners.

The only U.S organization to object was the Quiliute Indian Nation

Canada recommends an opening date the same as the Commission proposal of March 15. The concept of different opening dates for different countries was not discussed at the Conference Board and the Canadian section of the Conference Board did not intend March 15th to be proposed as a separate opening date but rather as an alternative to February 26.

The Canadians are concerned over the catch of summer resident 2B halibut during winter spawning off shore from Southeast Alaska. IPHC knowledge of winter spawning migration of halibut is sketchy at best and cannot clearly define how many fish are in a given area at a given time.

Also, in Canada during the week starting February 26th, the tides are very big and the Canadian section of the Conference Board was concerned about the gear loss and halibut wastage that would result from the inevitable race for the first fish that occurs at the start of the fishing season.

CATCH LIMIT RECOMMENDATIONS - ALL AREAS

The Conference Board's recommendations for 2006 are the same as the staff recommendations except for Area 2B.

2A	1.38 million pounds <Includes recreational catch>
2B	12.50 million pounds <Includes recreational catch>
2C	10.63 million pounds
3A	25.20 million pounds
3B	10.86 million pounds
4A	3.35 million pounds
4B	1.67 million pounds
4CDE	3.55 million pounds

Total 69.14 million pounds

The Conference Board considered a motion from the Canadian section to support a harvest limit of 12.5 million pounds which is approximately 700,000 pounds less than the staff's recommendation. The industry is concerned about their CPUE's, which are continuing to decline. There is also concern over the high removal rates in recent years.

The Conference Board debated a recommendation for a harvest of 11.64 million pounds in Area 3B this would have been an 11.5 percent reduction in the harvest from the 2005 harvest level. This action failed on a vote of 6 in favor, seven opposed, and nine abstentions from the US section. The Canadians had no comments on the 3B harvest recommendation.

The discussion points in favor of this action in summary are as follows

- 1 Recruitment levels into the fishery do not justify the 19.6% catch limit reduction for Area 3B.
- 2 Comparisons of CPUE both commercial and survey, as well as NMFS trawl surveys and the mark-capture data indicated additional exploitable biomass in Area 3B
- 3 The application of the 22.5% CEY in Area 3C will still reduce the catch limit by 1.5 million pounds or 11.5%

The complete arguments for a harvest level of 11.64 million pounds can be found in the Appendix of these minutes

The Conference Board discussed a harvest level of 1.89 million pounds to be harvest in Area 4B. The proposers recommended a harvest rate of 20% and pointed out that with the reductions in harvest from last year that the CPUE indexes had stabilized. This area is significantly dependent upon halibut as a cash resource and any significant reduction in harvest levels would have major economic implications for this area. The Conference Board entertained a motion to reconsider the staff recommendation of 1.67 million pounds, however this failed on a vote of 9 to 10.

In Area 4CDE the Conference Board discussed a reconsideration of the staff recommendation of 3.55 million pounds and this failed similarly 9 to 10.

The Conference Board discussed data and research needs for Area 4 later in our agenda and they are taken up under Other Conference Board Recommendations.

C. STAFF AND INDUSTRY PROPOSALS FOR CHANGES TO IPHC REGULATIONS

Change the sport possession limits in Washington, Oregon and California

The Conference Board unanimously endorsed the staff's proposal.

Record whether the weight is head-on or head-off on state fish tickets for Area 2A

The Conference Board unanimously endorsed the staff's proposal.

Recognition in IPHC regulations of the First Nation's Food Fishery in Area 2B

The Conference Board unanimously endorsed the staff's proposal.

Change the logbook requirements for British Columbia

The Conference Board unanimously endorsed the staff's proposal

Permit the Interagency Electronic Report System application, eLandings, to be used for Alaska commercial landings

The Conference Board unanimously endorsed the staff's proposal.

Remove the regulations that requires vessel operators to record personal use halibut in logbooks

The Conference Board unanimously endorsed the staff's proposal

Define net weight in IPHC regulations

The Conference Board unanimously endorsed the staff's proposal

Allow live halibut deliveries

The Conference Board supported the idea of providing live fish deliveries. Under this provision a vessel could bring in live halibut and the fish would be butchered at the dock or processing plant. NOAA Enforcement indicated some potential enforcement considerations that may need to be addressed for this to be allowed. The IPHC regulation requiring halibut landings to have the gills and entrails removed would have to be rescinded.

Set a legal-size limit for commercial, sport and sport charter fisheries

The Conference Board does not recommend this action as previous analysis has indicated that the sports and charter harvest weights would be greater with a mandatory size limit.

Allow the use of Electronic Logbooks I U.S. and Canada

Conference Board recommends that this proposal be re-submitted to the staff of the IPHC next year, as the staff currently is not ready to support this action.

In Alaska, allow IFQ halibut catch to be landed at ADF&G/NMFS accredited floating processors operating in Area 4:

The Conference Board was informed that there is currently no restriction to prevent harvester from having a processor operate in remote areas. The new web based reporting provisions will accommodate the proposers of this recommendation so no further action is required by the IPHC.

For one year in Alaska, require IFQ holders to record dogfish bycatch in their logbooks by set:

A motion was made that no action be taken at this time as provisions for dogfish retention already exist and vessels > 60ft. already identify bycatch in their logbooks. The State of Alaska provides for a 35% bycatch allotment of dogfish and the a federal bycatch up to 20% is available outside of 3 miles

Allow proxy fishing in the sport fishery which allows defined sport fishers to catch additional halibut over the daily allowance:

A motion was made that proxy fishing not be allowed – unanimously opposed.

Allow the skippers of IPHC charters in Area 4 discretion in setting and hauling when encountering whales

The Conference Board recommends that the submitters of this proposal work with the IPHC staff and resubmit recommendations in 2006 if needed.

There are three parts to the proposal including having a commercial fishing season length of April 1, 2006 to November 15, 2006; ease the catch limits by 10%; and allow a limited winter fishery to get data from tags on migration patterns

The proposal was withdrawn by the proponent because all of the parts of this proposal were covered by the Conference Board.

Season start date should be March 15

Season dates were dealt with earlier in the meeting..

D. OTHER CONFERENCE BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference Board Recommendations on Research Needs

“The Conference Board recommends studies focusing on the 2B/2C winter migration issue during the February 1 to March 15 period; and, research to further resolve fishery dynamics in Area 4 be prioritized for 2006. The Conference Board further recommends maintaining the existing 7-skate survey length in 2006 as a funding source if cost effective.

In order to resolve the concern about intercepting Area 2B fish while spawning in Area 2C and the eastern part of 3A the Conference Board supports focusing on appropriate tagging studies that will provide the IPHC with information about how much poundage might be intercepted if the season began February 15th. In addition to this the US section reiterates its request to the NMFS to finish the regulatory work that would allow the US to move to a 10 ½ month season.

The participants in Area 4 do not believe that there has been parity with regards to scientific work in Area 4 compared to the scientific efforts put into the other IPHC regulatory areas. The Conference Board requests specifically for Area 4E that CPUE data begin to be acquired and recorded in the Annual Report.

In Area 4CDE the area is extremely large and according to NMFS trawl surveys the abundance of halibut may be much larger than the IPHC surveys are indicating. The distribution of legal size halibut and juvenile halibut needs to be better understood throughout the eastern and western Bering Sea. Even though the harvest in Area 4 is not large relative to the central GOA its economic importance to the local isolated communities is extremely important. It is felt that this area has been overlooked in the past for additional scientific research.

In Area 4B the Conference Board has similar comments that we have made for Area 4CDE. However, this area has the complexity of being an island habitat for halibut that is not well understood. Migration patterns into Area 4B either from the Russian zone or the eastern Bering Sea needs to be better understood. The residents of this area are very dependent upon halibut as one of the few economic opportunities that small vessel owners can participate in.

Letter to NPFMC

The Conference Board requests the IPHC Commissioners write a letter to the NPFMC requesting that under future rationalization plans, the Council adopt alternatives that reduce halibut bycatch. Stopping the race for fish will allow a savings of halibut bycatch rather than using this halibut to prosecute other fisheries. The Conference Board requests that the letter indicate a need for an overall halibut bycatch mortality reduction.

Conference Board Resolution

The Conference Board recommends the following resolution:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 2006 IPHC Conference Board requests the IPHC Commissioners send a letter to the NPFMC stating the importance of:

1. Maintaining the research and CEY setting process with the current IPHC process;
2. Ensuring that catch information collected through logbooks be accurate and verifiable so that halibut can be tracked;
3. Maintaining the existing management areas for the commercial fleet. Sub-districts which cause displacement of the commercial effort could confound CPUE data currently used in stock management and potentially increase bycatch, gear conflicts and gear loss;
4. Clearly specify limits of State authority and provide for a review of any State charter boat program so catch information is recorded when halibut is retained and can be tracked back to individual clients.

Draft Conference Committee Recommendations

Area 3B

2006 Catch Limit

Recommendation: Use the 22.5% CEY in area 3B so that the 2006 catch limit recommendation is 11.64 million pounds or an 11.5% decrease from the 2005 catch limit. (As opposed to 10.86 million pounds and a 19.6% decrease.)

- Justification:**
1. Staff's separation of area 3B as a "non core" area is no longer justified. Staff argues that the 9 year data history justifies a CEY that is lower than that for areas 3A and 2C.(see pp. 61-2 of meeting book). While this justification may have been compelling in the two or three years after 1996, it no longer is persuasive. Obviously, area 3B will never "catch up" with the larger data sets in Areas 3A and 2C. After 9 years the 3B data should be viewed with a degree of reliability approaching the data for 3A and 2C.
 2. Recruitment levels into the fishery do not justify the 19.6% catch limit reduction for area 3B. The recruitment tables on page 52 clearly indicate substantial recruitment into the 3B fishery during the last few years. Although the "spawning" biomass shows some decline, it is clear that the age 8+ biomass is increasing and will recruit into the fishery. Consequently, tracking the catch limit to the very bottom of the spawning biomass curve is not necessary.
 3. Comparisons of CPUE, both commercial and survey, as well as NMFS trawl surveys and the mark-capture data indicate additional exploitable biomass in area 3B. Based on these indices it would appear that more halibut are available in area 3B than, for example, area 2C. (See page 44 of meeting book.) Nevertheless, staff estimates an exploitable biomass in area 2C that is 16 million pounds or 26% higher than area 2C. This should give us all pause about fairly radical changes in catch limits in area 3B. At a minimum, these indices would justify an constant exploitation yield (CEY) rate in area 3B that is the same as area 2C (22.5%)
 4. The application of the 22.5% CEY in area 3C will still reduce the catch limit by 1.5 million pounds or 11.5%. This type of reduction, the largest for any area in the Gulf of Alaska and west coast, shows application of the precautionary principle, rapid response as spawning biomass declines and skepticism about future recruitment --- all important goals for the IPHC. However, applying a common CEY to area 3B mitigates the economic harm to the fishery when, in all likelihood, within a year or two the catch limit will be substantially increased. The goals of the IPHC don't require going to the extreme catch limit reductions recommended by IPHC staff.